

AN ANALYSIS OF “THE GYMNASTICS BATTLE AT STOCKHOLM ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS”

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Abstract

Introduction. In order to examine the consequences that a changed view of the child had on early twentieth-century teaching in Sweden, this article analyses a battle that erupted when a proposal for new lesson content for Swedish school gymnastics was presented. **Material and methods.** The study method is a comparative qualitative analysis of texts which present the views of the supporters and opponents of the proposal. The data analysis is based on a model showing five different constructions of childhood: a moment of innocence and purity; a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power; the primitive stage of human evolution; a time for redemption: saving the child from his/her sinful nature; and a period of active growth. **Results.** For the proposal's supporters, the fact that they mainly regarded childhood as a time of active growth meant a form of gymnastics more suited to children and their needs as well as a desire to get them to participate and become involved. For the proposal's opponents, the notion of childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution meant that considerable space was accorded to order movements, commands, and other military elements designed to subjugate and control in order to develop and civilise pupils in accordance with the values and ideals this side represented. **Conclusions.** The findings show that the views of both sides concerning which gymnastics should be practised can be linked to different notions of the child.

Key words: school gymnastics, children, democratic welfare state, Ling gymnastics, text analysis

Introduction

From the end of the eighteenth century onwards, various types of schools started to appear around the world. A number of different factors in the respective countries helped shape the form the schools took. The social and political structures, combined with ideas about the future, were among the most significant factors. The first half of the nineteenth century saw the introduction of national mass education in Western Europe and North America. Previously the responsibility of the Church, education now became state controlled and simultaneously its provision expanded socially. This meant, in principle, that all members of society would receive some form of state education.

According to the British sociologist Andy Green, the key to understanding is that mass schooling was part of the process of state formation. Its emergence, according to Green, was not due to popular demand or purely to market forces but to the fact that it was organised by the state. Looking at the issue from the perspective of democratisation does not explain why an undemocratic nation like Prussia introduced mass education before England did. Nor do economic reasons explain why England, the cradle of industrialisation, was not a world leader in education – in fact, it was quite the opposite. Green maintains instead that the different ways that education systems developed stemmed from each country's needs and its social and political structure. National education systems emerged first in countries where the process of state formation was at its most intensive, such as Prussia and the United States after winning independence from Britain [1].

There is thus a link between the development of schools in the Western world and the state formation that was part of the modern social project. Modernity is a difficult concept since it depends on elements such as the historical period and context. Here it is understood as the social order that grew out of the En-

lightenment, based on rational/scientific principles, the rights of the individual, and established political and economic systems in the form of industrialisation, capitalism, and the nation-state and its constituent institutions and forms of surveillance [2]. The view of, or constructions of, the child can also be linked here to the development of schools. It is this link that is the focus of the current study. Using Sweden and Swedish school gymnastics as an example, the consequences that a changed view of the child had for early twentieth-century teaching will be examined. This was a period when the creation of the democratic welfare state began.

The Gymnastics Battle

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Elin Falk, the newly appointed gymnastics inspector for Stockholm elementary schools, was tasked with developing new movements and lesson content for young children's and girls' gymnastics instruction. Falk's proposal attracted much attention, giving rise to what the press called “the Gymnastics Battle at Stockholm Elementary Schools”, a dispute that took place from 1910 to 1913, when Falk triumphed with the Stockholm Elementary School Board's adoption of her proposal [3, 4].

Falk had been a student at the Royal Central Institute of Gymnastics (GCI) in Stockholm, founded in 1813 with the aim of developing Swedish gymnastics, and obtained her degree in 1895. Afterwards she spent a number of years abroad, amongst other things, teaching gymnastics in the United States, England, and Denmark. When she returned to Sweden, she started working on reforming school gymnastics, which raised the interest of the Stockholm Elementary School Board. In 1909, she was appointed the gymnastics inspector for Stockholm elementary schools and was tasked with devising a proposal for a new gymnastics instruction.

The controversy caused by Falk's proposal saw her receive

support from, amongst others, Karolina Widerström, who, apart from being Sweden's first fully qualified female physician, had also been a student at the GCI and graduated in 1875. In 1909, she was elected into the Stockholm Elementary School Board, where she contributed to Falk being appointed as the gymnastics inspector. Falk's proposal was also backed by a number of elementary school teachers in Stockholm. The opposition mainly came from the GCI's then director, Nils Sellén. He was supported by a number of elementary school inspectors as well as gymnastics teachers at the GCI and elementary schools. Sellén also served as the expert on the review panel set up by the Stockholm Elementary School Board to evaluate Falk's proposal [3, 4, 5].

The discussion surrounding the proposal involved various authorities and was conducted at different levels of the education system: from gymnasiums, teaching colleagues, and teachers' associations to the Stockholm Elementary School Board, the GCI, as well as the daily press.

Ling gymnastics: Sweden's physical cultural contribution to the world

Understanding why the dispute occurred requires a brief account of the dominant form of school gymnastics in Sweden at the time, namely, Ling gymnastics. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, various forms of movement culture were evolving in Europe: Ling gymnastics in Sweden, *Turnen* in Germany, and sport in England. The newfound interest in physical activity arose for a number of reasons. Particularly significant were the new educational ideals of late eighteenth-century Enlightenment philosophy, the ideals of equality stemming from the French revolution, expanded citizenship training, and the need for physical strength prompted by the Napoleonic wars. At the forefront of the new gymnastics was the philanthropic educational movement that emerged in Germany during the final decades of the eighteenth century. In special educational institutions, "schools of philanthropy", physical exercise was given major prominence. A humane education was to draw attention to the body as well. The physical exercise comprised a mixture of aristocratic forms on the one hand, such as fencing, horse riding, and dance, and bourgeois or generally popular sporting activities, such as running, skating, and hiking, on the other. Nevertheless, the exponents systematised, and where necessary created, movements and exercises, considered various programmes and methods, and reflected on specific physical effects. The leading reformer, Johann C. F. Guts Muths, published his ideas in 1793 in an influential text that has been translated into many languages, *Gymnastik für die Jugend* (published in English as *Gymnastics for Youth*) [6].

One person influenced by the new gymnastics was the Swede Per Henrik Ling. In 1813, Ling was tasked with setting up the GCI, the first Swedish state institution charged with training military and civilian gymnastics teachers. At the GCI, he developed what became known as Ling gymnastics, which came to be Sweden's contribution to international physical education. Ling divided his gymnastics into four parts: educational, military, medical, and aesthetic. Educational gymnastics was the form implemented in schools. However, it came to be influenced by the more exercise- and fight-oriented content of military gymnastics, even if this content was principally intended for soldier training. For example, considerable space was given to fencing. Medical gymnastics was designed to cure or alleviate illnesses and physical suffering. It gave Ling gymnastics the medical and physiological features that also influenced educational gymnastics, for example regarding the importance of posture. Finally, the aim of the aesthetic form was to express the internal, that is thoughts and feelings, through the external, the body [6, 7].

One of the cornerstones of Ling gymnastics was the link between physical exercise and science. For Ling, the scientificity

of this approach stemmed from the fact that every movement was based on the then knowledge of human anatomy and physiology. The aim was to construct movements that would help the body develop as comprehensively as possible in order to achieve a harmonious whole. This included even the internal organs and the soul. The notion of the harmonious whole can be derived from Ling's natural philosophical view of everything being connected. Since a person was made up of a number of parts, he/she could not be whole; instead, the whole was dependent on the relationships between the parts. If they remained harmonious, health was achieved, whereas disharmony caused ill health [6, 8].

Even gymnastics' parts embodied holistic thinking. The purpose of educational gymnastics was to develop natural ability into unity between the different parts of the body and that of military gymnastics was to achieve unity between the body and the weapon. When medical gymnastics made its debut, something had gone awry, and with the help of special movements, an attempt was made to restore the initial unity. Finally, aesthetic gymnastics was to develop unity between the body and the soul. Ling regarded this link as strong. The body not at peace within was, according to him, at war with its "spiritual being" [9].

The idea that everyone – the young and the old, men and women – could and, for health reasons, ought to exercise in such a way was also central to Ling gymnastics. Moreover, the movements were to give not only the body but also morality an opportunity to develop in a comprehensive way. A form of gymnastics designed to develop the whole body where the individual was part of a group that would, on command, simultaneously and correctly execute movements meant people also received a moral education, one in which self-discipline, attentiveness, obedience, and orderliness were keywords. The aim was clear: the physical and moral education of the whole population [10].

Research has described Ling gymnastics as one of Sweden's greatest cultural exports. As early as the 1830s, the GCI was starting to send "missionaries" abroad, and around the turn of the twentieth century, scores of foreign students were visiting the institute. Ling gymnastics thus had a strong position in Sweden when Falk put forward her proposal at the beginning of the twentieth century: among the gymnastics teaching profession, school staff, and the educated public, it was viewed as superior to all other forms of physical exercise. Moreover, in a number of other countries, e.g. Denmark, Norway, England, Belgium, Portugal, and the United States, it had established a foothold in teaching, and it gave the GCI status: it was, of course, the bastion of Ling gymnastics [6, 7].

Falk's proposal for new gymnastics exercises and the ensuing disagreements have been the subject of a number of pieces of Swedish research in which the battle between tradition and modernisation is seen as a general explanation for the discord. The modernisers were backed by modern science, which started to emerge at the end of the nineteenth century. The science that is principally highlighted is natural science, but psychology and pedagogy are also mentioned without closer examination [3, 4, 11]. This study will focus greater attention on pedagogy and, to a certain extent, psychology; the notions of the child adopted by the opponents and supporters of Falk's proposal will be analysed.

Notions of the child

The views concerning children and childhood have varied over time and among cultures. The two main categories research has pointed to are whether children have been seen as a special group, and childhood thus a special period, or regarded more as imperfect adults. Even if reality is more complicated, broadly speaking the latter notion existed during the Middle Ages. Still, this did not mean a lack of awareness of development stages; on

the contrary, there was a progression regarding what responsibility and tasks young people could be entrusted with. During the early modern period, however, childhood started to be regarded as a special state, a view reinforced during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century, the modern view of childhood was constructed, which, for instance, is characterised by a lengthier period [12, 13, 14].

The various childhoods that research has seen over the years can, some researchers believe, only be understood based on how generations and groups have acted according to the social, economic, religious, and political contexts they found themselves in. For instance, influences from romanticism, industrialisation, and urbanisation had affected the nineteenth-century view of children and childhood, just as democracy, psychoanalysis, and natural science shaped the twentieth-century view [15]. This applies to the Western world, but researchers have pointed to similarities in other parts of the world. For example, the new childhood discourse that emerged in Japan at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century contained, just as in Europe and North America, the institutions and ideas we normally associate with modernity, such as school, science, and individualisation [16].

When it comes to notions of the child, history has shown there to be recurrent ideas or themes concerning whether children are basically good and innocent or born evil, whether they are a blank canvas when they are born or have certain innate characteristics, as well as the difference between nature and nurture. In pedagogy, the child's development and learning have been studied from a number of perspectives: historical, psychological, sociological, philosophical, etc. Pedagogical psychology, or educational psychology, is an area of knowledge that concerns itself with the processes of teaching and learning and studies their psychological aspects. One of the leading lights in this field is Jean Piaget, whose theories about the stages of development of the child laid the foundations of school systems around the world during the first half of the twentieth century. According to Piaget, the phases that a child's cognitive development goes through are biologically determined, and the child cannot absorb knowledge that is too advanced for its biological development. Piaget's biological approach to child development can be contrasted with that of Lev Vygotsky. The latter maintains that the child should, in order to develop to its maximum, be given tasks more complicated than what it has been able to deal with thus far [17].

Since one of the aims of pedagogy is to change people through education, value-theoretical questions are also key: which norms and ideals should the pupil learn and what should he or she learn to see as good or evil? Value-theoretical questions may be individualistic, religious, or social. For example, John Dewey was a proponent of social values and developed a social pedagogy [18]. Regarding the sociological perspective, research has in recent times highlighted the concept of childhood as a social construction [13]. This approach would seem useful for studying the school from a social perspective, which is the aim of this study. One researcher who brings together a philosophical, historical, and sociological perspective when looking at childhood, specifically from the Enlightenment onwards, linking it to modernity, is the American educational philosopher Guoping Zhao. Zhao discerns five different constructions of childhood: a moment of innocence and purity; a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power; the primitive stage of human evolution; a time for redemption: saving the child from his/her sinful nature; and a period of active growth [19].

As for the first of these constructions, childhood as a moment of innocence and purity, Zhao views it as a historically prominent construction in which children are seen as innately good, an idealised image that has proved to be applicable in various

sociopolitical contexts, e.g. in the struggle to regulate child labour during the initial phase of industrialisation in the United Kingdom. Even if this way of viewing children appears protective, it also means that children are seen as inexperienced, dependent and controllable. A further consequence is that deviant children need to be admonished in order to fit the image of the good child [19].

The second construction, childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power, derives from Enlightenment philosophers, such as Locke, Hobbes and even Rousseau. Locke compared children to "travellers newly arrived in a strange country, of which they know nothing" [19]. Until they acquired a suitable level of sense and reason, which they, of course, had inside them, those who had acquired this had to control them, make decisions for them, and consent for them. Because even if children had an innate potential for rationality, it could not be left to nature to take care of; instead, it required control and education. One educational task was moulding their very beings and denying their passion and desires so they would grow up to be self-controlled subjects [19].

Hobbes, too, believed that children had to be under the dominion of adults until they acquired the necessary reason to be equal individuals capable of looking after themselves. And despite his championing of the ideas about a natural and free education, Rousseau felt that one of the tasks of pedagogy, and the tutor, was "determining, engineering, and perfecting the 'unfolding' nature of children". It was the adult's task to bend the will and wishes of the children so that they concurred with his or hers [19].

The opportunity to mould children is also included in Zhao's third construction, the view of childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution, a notion that developed chronologically during the second half of the nineteenth century. The fact that children are regarded as primitive meant they were seen as inferior beings, whose thinking, ability to communicate, and behaviour are per definition undeveloped and must therefore be developed, which, in turn, underlies the need to control and subjugate children in order to "civilise" them, or as Zhao expresses it: "to help them catch up with civilization". The similarity between this construction of childhood and Western European imperialism, with which it simultaneously emerged, and the racism that legitimised it is clear. Also here there is the creation of the somewhat inferior Other. The construction of childhood as primitive has given rise to a number of child-rearing strategies, e.g. controlling children by dominating and subjugating, excluding them, or rewarding correct behaviour. Even special programmes have been, and are being, designed to help particularly difficult children to become civilised [19].

The fourth construction, childhood as a time for redemption: saving the child from his/her sinful nature, is reminiscent, according to Zhao, of the notions of the child as primitive. But whilst the latter has been supported by science, especially psychology and pedagogy, the former has its roots in religious notions of original sin and children having to be aware of their sinfulness so they can repent and be saved. Even if the Christian undertones, at least in some quarters, lack legitimacy nowadays, the outlook, in Zhao's opinion, remains at a more implicit level in terms of how we negatively interpret children, their ways, and their behaviours. If children do not meet the norm we have established for how they should be and behave, "they are trivialized and rationalized as manipulative" [19, 20]. The idea that children are manipulative legitimates an education based on control and dominance. For this purpose, it is felt clear guidelines are required for what is expected of the normal child, and deviants are punished in various ways in order to "save" them [19].

What the four constructions described above have in common is that they view the child as an object, as someone requir-

ing special treatment who needs to be subjugated, formed, controlled, and/or normalised. However, there is, according to Zhao, a construction that, at least theoretically, acknowledges the child as a subject, namely, childhood as a period of active growth. This outlook, which, for instance, emphasises the child's inherent curiosity and active role in the interaction with the surrounding environment, emerged around the turn of the twentieth century and constitutes the core of a modern democratic society, where people no longer have to be subjects but are citizens. However, in Zhao's opinion, even if this construction assumes a positive view of the child, there is also some ambivalence here, one that can be found throughout the project of modernity: "empowerment and domination of the subject". This is because this construction often has a hidden agenda of social control that goes beyond the child's need for support, guidance, and boundaries [19].

Material and methods

The study method used is a comparative qualitative analysis of the texts presenting Falk's proposal and the views of its supporters, on the one hand, and those of its opponents, on the other. Text analysis is a systematic analysis of primary data collected from various types of texts and the analysis method can be quantitative and/or qualitative. In this instance, it is qualitative since it is the meaning in the form of ideas expressed in the collected texts which address the gymnastics battle at Stockholm elementary schools in different ways that is the focus. An analysis consisting of two steps was carried out, the first of which consisted in highlighting the ideas in the texts. An idea comprises a practically coherent construction of thought that expresses an idea of reality or an evaluation of a phenomenon. Moreover, the texts almost invariably contain more or less explicit recommendations for action. The ideas held by the two opposing groups were then compared. For this purpose, the texts in question were carefully read several times, each reading entailing a deeper analysis.

Comparative studies like this one are based on the assumption that there are similarities and differences between particular approaches and the differences can be explained. For the latter aim, a further analysis method, the second step, is required since the comparison only reveals them. In this instance, the method comprises Zhao's aforementioned model, in which he highlights five different constructions of childhood: a moment of innocence and purity; a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power; the primitive stage of human evolution; a time for redemption: saving the child from his/her sinful nature; and a period of active growth.

The source material comprises articles from Stockholm newspapers that, in various ways, reported on the battle: *Dagens Nyheter* and *Stockholmstidningen* (from 1910 to 1913), as well as articles in the professional journal *Tidskrift i Gymnastik* (first published in 1874 by the Swedish Association of Physical Education Teachers). This journal not only discussed professional issues, but it also was, in many respects, a medium for the development of gymnastics and for the GCI. By giving representatives of the GCI, physicians, physiologists and gymnastics teachers considerable space, the journal served as an arena where the school subject gymnastics and its content were discussed. In this journal Falk was heavily criticised for her proposal at the same time as her supporters and opponents were publishing their articles. The actual proposal, with its exercises and movements, was published in book form; these books are also included in the study.

The findings section is arranged into two parts, the first dealing with the content of the ideas of the two opposing groups and the second analysing the discernible notions of the child. Apart from Falk, the pro-proposal camp is represented in the written

public debate by Karolina Widerström; Maria Palmquist, whom the Stockholm Elementary School Board had tasked to examine the proposal; and a number of elementary school teachers in Stockholm. In the opposition camp the following persons were particularly influential: the GCI's director, Nils Sellén; Louise von Bahr, a gymnastics teacher at the GCI; and a number of elementary school teachers in Stockholm.

It is evident from the press's reporting, both as the battle raged and retrospectively, that even contemporaries had difficulty understanding it. Some viewed it as a trivial battle; others gave the arguments of the two camps their close attention [21].

Results

The pro-proposal camp's ideas

The reference point for the pro-proposal camp was that educational gymnastics had become stale. According to them, it had been characterised by stagnation for too long a time. Particularly alarming was the fact that it had not embraced new scientific findings, neither physiological nor psychological ones; instead, it had been maintained due to tradition and the conviction that it was the best approach available. The supporters of the proposal thought that it should "be rejuvenated, developed and newly created", which incidentally was in keeping with Per Henrik Ling's wish for the gymnastics he founded to be constantly nourished by science [22].

One example used to highlight stagnation was posture. Falk was highly critical of the rigid military posture that characterised the contemporary form of Ling gymnastics. According to her, it was a "temporarily created" posture and could not be maintained outside the gymnasium, i.e. in everyday life. For Falk, a good posture was also important; at the end of the 1920s, she was to devise a specific posture gymnastics for elementary schools, but it had become complex and did not serve any practical function [11].

Another focus point of the pro-proposal side was the balance between tension and relaxation. In order to achieve the ease and naturalness needed for the straight posture, i.e. a posture not as tense as the one that characterised Ling gymnastics at the time, the proposal contained numerous relaxation and tension exercises. These, however, were not only to develop the posture but also make sure that pupils would learn to only activate the muscles or muscle groups required for a specific movement. Moreover, resting time had been incorporated. This was part of energy-conservation thinking, which was very important to Falk. Not expending more energy than necessary to execute a movement was something pupils definitely had to learn in school gymnastics so that they could implement it in their daily life. In a work situation, using only the muscles required would, in her opinion, give people a more tolerable existence [22].

Furthermore, the pro-proposal camp focused on the tediousness afflicting school gymnastics. In her proposal, Falk wanted the military command movements in the form of marching, halting, the feet close together, turning, etc., which often took up much of the lesson time, to be practised less. Instead, the pupils would quickly start to practise the "real" gymnastics. The pro-proposal camp also criticised the range of movements for being small. The monotony caused by doing the same movements practically every day at school resulted in gymnastics being perceived as boring. For that reason, Falk devised new movements she found in the Ling gymnastics that Per Henrik Ling and his son, Hjalmar Ling, had earlier created – movements that, according to Falk, had been forgotten. Moreover, she designed new movements which were to introduce change and variation. In her report on the proposal, which was delivered to the assessment group, Palmquist explains that after having tried the exercises herself, both during her own lessons and when she super-

vised seminar students, she regarded the range of movements as "extremely abundant" and the daily exercises, i.e. the systematised lesson content, as varied and challenging [11, 24, 25].

What Falk's supporters particularly highlighted in the proposal and sympathised with was that, in their view, in the new exercises she took the child into consideration. In contrast to Ling gymnastics that was designed for military preparation, Falk's proposal served a practical, everyday purpose and was adapted to the child's development. Hence, the proposal contained individualised exercises for young children, which stood in opposition to the universality the supporters of traditional Ling gymnastics stressed. Falk had created infant gymnastics based on "observations of the peculiar physiology and psychology of infants". The aim was to give the children "easy, lively and joy-bringing movements", which also taught them movements and positions that could be of use to them outside school. Moreover, in the proposal, Falk tailored the words of command preceding every movement to a language young children could understand. Instead of terms such as "trunk sideways, legs apart and head sideways", she introduced "touch right heel", an unheard-of adaptation designed for young children. In her opinion, gymnastics for this group needed to be conducted in what she calls "a childlike fantasy language" that children could understand and enjoy. Complicated terms were to be prohibited and replaced by "hop, ghost jump, walk like a chicken, etc.", terms that, according to Palmquist, worked well in practice for both teachers and pupils [11, 22, 24].

The opposing camp's idea content

At the heart of the opposition's criticism of Falk's proposal was that its content was a violation of the long-standing principles of Ling gymnastics: gymnastics was to be corrective, disciplinary, and character building, as well as developing the body. Achieving this required, according to the opposing side, tremendous precision regarding the order, progression, and form of the movements. Because the proposal divided up the previously very closely interrelated daily exercises, changed some of the ways of executing the movements, and also removed movements and added new ones, Falk was deemed to have unduly rejected the principles [11, 22, 24].

Another fundamental rule that Falk's proposal was felt to have broken was terminology. Ling gymnastics had hitherto used military commands. These comprised a few words saying which movement was to be done, i.e. words of command, and a word of execution signalling that the movement was to be performed. A classic example is "arms down – bend" or "arms up – stretch", where bend and stretch are words of execution. As evidenced above, Falk rejected a language that young children could not understand, which her critics believed created indistinctions and inconsistencies. As far as the names of the movements were concerned, "absolute unanimity" was important so that there was no confusion regarding what was to be actually done. To make it easier for young children to understand the commands, Falk had, for example, as already mentioned, proposed that the command "trunk sideways, legs apart and head sideways" be replaced by "touch right heel". This was regarded not only as a linguistic deviation but also significant for the movement's corrective effect on the body. Moreover, changes like this, such as "grind coffee" instead of "grind salt" or "low jump" instead of "spring jump", were seen as "damaging common property, which no individual has the right to do" [11, 23, 24].

A further element of the proposal which aroused criticism was that it featured games in an excessive amount and during gymnastics exercise as such. Falk wanted to introduce games as part of gymnastics, whilst the supporters of traditional Ling gymnastics, who admittedly acknowledged the value of games for children and thus wanted to have games included in the gymnastics lesson, felt that they should be differentiated from

gymnastics, which was serious and must not be interfered with. According to her opponents, Falk had, in order to arouse the joy and interest of children, transformed important gymnastics movements into games and had therefore sacrificed seriousness. They believed it was not difficult to get children interested in games, but it was challenging to stimulate their interest in seriousness and work so that the exercises would gradually be performed voluntarily. According to them, one of the tasks of gymnastics was to create strong, resistant people, thus children needed to be schooled in strength, work, and precision, part of which was learning to differentiate between fun and seriousness [11, 24].

Distinguishing between fun and seriousness emphasised the educational and disciplinary role of gymnastics, and this was an important principle of traditional Ling gymnastics. Since Ling gymnastics placed exacting demands on precision and harmony in the execution of movements, the opposing camp felt that the desire of children to obey was strengthened and they were thereby forced to overcome "slowness and indolence". Moreover, gymnastics would train young children to set boundaries, something they were deemed in need of learning in order for them to be able to control themselves, both physically and mentally. According to the opposing camp, another task of gymnastics was for boys to become accustomed to the formations, order movements, and discipline they would later encounter when doing their military service. Falk's proposal risked losing these benefits [24, 25].

The opponents felt the aforementioned reasons were so alarming that they not only warned of the proposal but also objected "in the strongest terms" to its being adopted at elementary schools in Stockholm to the Stockholm Elementary School Board. One reason why they felt they had to warn of the proposal in such strong terms was not only because it constituted a violation of the hitherto prevailing praxis in Swedish gymnastics and at the GCI; they also thought that if it were introduced into Stockholm elementary schools, it would not be confined to Stockholm but spread throughout the country, or in fact the gymnastics world. Indeed they viewed Ling gymnastics and thereby the GCI as a global matter [24].

In summary, there are a number of differences between the views represented by Falk and the supporters of her proposal, on the one hand, and its critics, on the other. Indeed, both sides felt they represented the true Ling gymnastics, but whilst Falk believed that with her exercises she had returned to the original form introduced by Per Henrik Ling and further developed and systematised by Hjalmar Ling, the opposing side claimed that she had violated it. And whilst the pro-proposal camp believed that Ling gymnastics had become stale and was no longer fulfilling Per Henrik's wish for constant further development, the opposition saw Ling gymnastics as complete and thought that it did not require any changes.

Another key difference between the two sides concerned the purpose of gymnastics in a wider perspective. Whilst the opposing camp clearly stressed military interests and motives, the pro-proposal side highlighted practical everyday reasons. The military purpose was probably the reason why the opposition stressed the significance of preserving the seriousness and discipline of gymnastics. For them, it was important to differentiate between fun and seriousness, whilst the pro-proposal camp felt that gymnastics needed to be made more stimulating and varied so that pupils would not find it so boring that they did not want to practise it, neither during their time at school nor when they finished it. Regarding the latter, i.e. pupils' time after school, Falk also emphasised that by, for instance, doing relaxation exercises, pupils would learn to look after their bodies so that they, that is the bodies, would cope with adult work.

From the survey of both sides' views of what school gymnastics should entail and the evaluation of the other side's motives,

one key difference stands out that, for instance, is noticeable in the divided opinions about which terminology was suitable: should gymnastics be tailored to the child or the other way round? One possible reason for this difference could be that the two sides essentially had contrasting notions of the child.

The gymnastics battle and notions of the child

As for Zhao's five constructions of the child and childhood, neither of the two sides show any trace of the childhood he refers to as a moment of innocence and purity. There are no such idealised descriptions of the child. One explanation might be that the sociopolitical or moral field was not discussed in the gymnastics battle. Topics such as child labour or child abuse are areas where children may need to be protected, but this requires other types of arguments than what form of school gymnastics they should have.

On the other hand, the second construction, childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power, is represented by both sides – even if more explicitly by the opponents of Falk's proposal. According to this camp, one of the important aims of school gymnastics was to teach children to obey and submit to someone else's will, which is in keeping with Lockean thinking that adults should not only make decisions for children, but, because they do not understand what is best for them, also consent for them. In order to strengthen their will, children needed adults to help set boundaries; the younger the children, the stricter these limits needed to be [11, 24].

But even the pro-proposal camp sometimes expressed itself in terms of discipline and instruction. For instance, in almost Rousseauian language, the significance of the principle of bending the willow while it is young was emphasised; at the same time, they underscored the importance of not making excessive demands of young children regarding order and discipline. However, the demands would increase with age. Moreover, they also mention control, but it was not the children who, at least not explicitly, would be controlled, but the movements executed as envisaged, which by extension naturally includes the means of disciplining [24, 25, 26]. Furthermore, the opposing side exhibit traits of the third construction, childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution, in which the child is seen as undeveloped and in need of civilising. One example is the recurrent emphasis on the importance of teaching children self-control, both physical and mental, in order, for instance, for them to be able to conquer feelings of discomfort, such as idleness, idleness, fear of danger, or fear of failing. There are also examples of children being compared to people with physical or mental impairments.

The younger a person is, the narrower and more distinct the external boundaries they need. If we proceed to the sick, the mentally deranged or spinal sufferers, where the intervention, the coordination is, in one way or another, impaired, the gymnastic treatment is thus focused on executing the simplest task in the most precise way [24, 25].

The opposing camp's arguments also contain elements of social Darwinism, which is a part of the construction of childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution. Life was viewed as a difficult struggle, and it was important to strengthen children so that they would develop into strong, upright, resistant people who would not perish in this struggle. For example, the numerous elements of fun found in Falk's form of gymnastics were linked to the extremes to which society went to turn seriousness into fun, where there was deemed to be something "emasculating and mollicoddling". For this reason the proposal's contents was perceived as dangerous in terms of undermining the creation of the strong, resistant people required. If gymnastics was performed according to the existing tradition, and not changed in accordance with Falk's proposal, "perhaps

we wouldn't get so many weak wretches who on suffering their first major setback take their lives to avoid the seriousness" [24].

In keeping with this is the preservation of military instruction, which, for the opponents of Falk's proposal, was a vital element of school gymnastics, i.e. it would lay the groundwork for military service. The fact that the *Handbok i gymnastik för armén och flottan* (The Army and Navy Gymnastics Manual) was the ideal for how school gymnastics for young pupils (seven to nine years old) should be performed, how the movements should be executed, and what commands should be given shows how important military interests were for the opposing side [11]. One way of understanding this is in a social Darwinist context: life was not merely a struggle between individuals and groups but also between nations. Apart from strengthening, or rather hardening, the individual, gymnastics would contribute to the nation's resistance as well. A hardened people would beget a strong nation.

Neither side exhibits the fourth construction, the view of childhood as a time for redemption: saving the child from his/her sinful nature. One possible explanation for this is that the arguments in the debate regarding how children are and should be were not rooted in religion, but science. The fifth construction, childhood as a period of active growth, is, however, displayed by Falk and her supporters. Admittedly, even they saw childhood as "something peculiar", though in the sense of a specific development stage. According to them, children's brains and nervous systems were undeveloped, which meant problems with, for instance, fine motor ability. Hence, gymnastics had to be tailored to this and, as already mentioned, the language. However, there were also challenges: in Falk's proposal, there is a greater belief in what children can do and elements of an incipient individualisation.

The children in the parallel courses display a quite staggering difference regarding both intellectual and physical development. It is probably impossible to create daily exercises that are all suitable for these different categories [24].

As for the purpose of gymnastics for young children, it was, according to the pro-proposal camp, to try to maintain the children's "love for physical movement" and prevent the sedentary schoolwork from "killing nature's demand for movement" [25]. For this end, it was important that there was a place for "merit" and excessive demands were not made on order and precision. However, it was important that the demands were met. Even this side insisted on children being orderly and disciplined, but there was to be an interaction between children and adults, one that, to some extent, manifests itself in the pro-proposal camp's motto: "Issue few commands, regularly do free exercises!" [11, 22].

To sum up by, based on Zhao's constructions of childhood, putting together the profiles of both sides in the battle over school gymnastics at Stockholm elementary schools, the opposing camp is characterised by a mixture of viewing childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power and the primitive stage of human evolution, with emphasis on the latter. The former view is illustrated by the desire to command and control children, e.g. by stressing that those who are rational must consent for those who are not. The latter is evidenced by the notion that children must be developed and civilised in order to eventually become strong and resistant.

As for the pro-proposal side, it comprises a mixture of regarding childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power and a period of active growth. Elements of a desire to control and command are combined with wanting to give children an active role and an opportunity to interact with adults as well as a germ of individualisation. However, the pro-proposal camp has an instrumental view of children – one that corresponds to what Zhao refers to as ambiva-

lence in the project of modernity. The ambivalence is twofold: on the one hand, they see the child as an active subject that integrates with the surrounding environment and, on the other, there are elements of an instruction that exceeds support and guidance. Even if no evidence is found of the pro-proposal camp's espousal of a military instruction, there is a practical everydayness in which there is a working-life instruction, an elucidation for the future in keeping with the fact that gymnastics was envisaged for elementary school pupils. For their future working lives required durable bodies, of which the central role Falk gave energy-conservation thinking is an expression [10]. On the pro-proposal side, it is thus possible to discern a purpose that transcends the gymnasium and concerns training pupils to become physically strong workers.

Conclusions

The aim of this study was to examine the consequences that a changed view of the child had on early twentieth-century teaching in Sweden. For this purpose, the so-called battle unleashed by Falk's proposal for a new gymnastics instruction in Stockholm elementary schools was discussed. The opposition to this proposal was strong because the battle was a struggle between traditionalists and modernisers about scientificity and educational values, as demonstrated in earlier research, but also, as proven in this article, because both sides' ideas concerning the type of gymnastics that should be implemented can be linked to different notions of the child. This, in turn, influenced what they thought the purpose of school gymnastics should be and hence the didactic questions about the aim, content and method of the instruction, i.e. recommendations for action. For the pro-proposal camp, the fact that they mainly viewed childhood, and thus the child, as a period of active growth entailed a form of gymnastics more suited to children and their needs as well as a desire to encourage them to participate and become involved. For the opposing camp, the notion of childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution meant that considerable space was accorded to order movements, commands and other military elements designed to subjugate and control in order to develop and civilise pupils in accordance with the values and ideals this side represented.

Falk's proposal clearly embraced a new view of the child. An interesting question is why the proposal was put forward at that particular time and, perhaps more importantly, why it triumphed. To understand this, notions of the child must be put in a historical and a more global context. It seems that every historical period has its dominant construction of childhood: there is a link between romanticism and childhood as a moment of innocence and purity; the Enlightenment and childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power; imperialism and childhood as the primitive stage of human evolution; and democratisation and childhood as a period of active growth. During the period of societal development when the battle was being fought, the individual had begun to be liberated from the peasant society's traditional structures, the basis of which was the household. A conservative social pattern where the individual was placed, or inherited his/her place, in a static society was being supplanted by a dynamic model whose creation the individual would be involved in. This development was not unique to Sweden but was experienced by a number of Western countries.

For the impending new society, the democratic welfare state, Falk's form of gymnastics was more suitable. This society was based on a new principle where inhabitants were no longer rulers and subjects, but citizens, with all that an incipient individual responsibility entails. This transformation presupposed instruction and education in a number of areas so that the in-

habitants became citizens in the right way and the right place. In the change process, the school became an important institution, as did school gymnastics, but this required a new form of gymnastics with a new aim: to get pupils to become co-creators [13]. Unlike her former GCI colleagues, most of whom were on the opposing side, Falk was able to transform school gymnastics so that it met the new needs of society. It is no surprise that her proposal contained features of the construction that is clearly of relevance to the ideal of the Enlightenment, namely, childhood as a period of lacking, but with naturally unfolding potential for, rational power, with the focus on reason and rationality: because rational thinking is a fundamental idea throughout the nineteenth-century construction of Scandinavian societies.

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